



State of North Carolina Office of the Governor

For Release: **IMMEDIATE**
Date: Aug. 4, 2005

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HISTORIC BILL OF RIGHTS RETURNS TO NORTH CAROLINA

RALEIGH – Gov. Mike Easley today accepted North Carolina’s original copy of the Bill of Rights during a ceremony in the old Senate Chamber at the State Capitol. One of 14 original copies of the Bill of Rights commissioned by George Washington for the 13 colonies and the federal government, the document was stolen in 1865 from the State Capitol during the Civil War by a soldier in General Sherman’s army.

“North Carolina’s stolen Bill of Rights may have been out-of-state for nearly 140 years, but never out of mind,” Easley said. “I am pleased to accept this document on behalf of the state and look forward to having a grand celebration when we make it available to citizens and school children across North Carolina.”

Easley is planning a larger ceremony to officially accept the document as one of the state’s cultural and historic assets and make it available for citizens to view at sites across the state.

“I want to thank all the parties involved in the document’s safe return to its home: the U.S. Attorney’s Office, the FBI, Gov. Ed Rendell of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania law enforcement authorities and N.C. Attorney General Roy Cooper.”

The historic document is one of at least five of the original Bill of Rights that have been lost. It first reappeared in 1897 in Indianapolis but soon after was removed from public view.

Around 1925, North Carolina’s Secretary of History refused to purchase the stolen document and demanded its return. Another offer to purchase the document was made in 1995 and was similarly rejected. In early 2003, the National Constitutional Center in Philadelphia, Pa., received an offer to purchase the document for \$5 million from an unknown seller. The Center subsequently authenticated the document as North Carolina’s copy. Rendell advised Easley in late February 2003 regarding the document and the offer to purchase. Easley and his staff then set up a plan to locate and seize the document.

North Carolina’s Bill of Rights eventually was recovered in March 2003 in Philadelphia, through a collaborative sting operation involving the FBI and the National Constitutional Center. Easley coordinated recovery of the document with the assistance of the Pennsylvania Governor’s Office, the